



# Legamaster qualitative research 2017

Use of writing surfaces in the Dutch and German  
corporate and educational environment

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# INTRODUCTION

## Background information

Digitalization is affecting the future of writing surfaces

Writing is one of the oldest communication forms in history. Already learnt at a young age and developed over years of practicing each handwriting is unique. It reflects the individuality of each person and is one of those basic skills known by nearly 86%\* of the world's population. But handwriting could face hard times regarding its future: megatrends like digitalization bring major changes to places and situations where writing traditionally has been a necessary and omnipresent tool – may it be in a private, educational or corporate context. Today only keyboards or touch surfaces are needed to let users of digital tools capture and process information. As a consequence, analogue writing surfaces like the well-known whiteboards or flipcharts seem to lose importance these days, as they represent artefacts and thus a remainder of times long before the digital shift. This digital shift with regards to technological possibilities is accompanied by significant changes of the workplace and educational environment itself: big screens, interactive boards or tablets are likely to be found in huddle rooms and classrooms, supporting seamlessly new Agile working methods such as Scrum and Design Thinking.

But apart from these obvious shifts: do first impressions deceive? How will the future of writing really look like? Which writing surfaces will survive, which may not? And last but not least: which needs and causes lie behind those developments?

To get a clearer understanding about how the field of digital and analogue writing will develop in the upcoming years, a qualitative survey was conducted by the company Legamaster, a specialist in Visual Communication solutions.

In order to embrace current and future developments in its market and hence offer solutions of added value,

Legamaster strives for a customer centric approach, deepening its understanding of gain creators and pain relievers of its end users. As a consequence this study was conducted in the first half of 2017 and is based on the results of 44 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with participants from the corporate and educational sector in Germany and the Netherlands.

This whitepaper comprises and presents the key findings of this empirical study.

**CORPORATE**

**EDUCATION**

# ESSENTIAL RESULTS

## 1. Writing is a social activity

Visualization as support of creative processes and result of Agile working methods

**1** Asked about the role of writing in the corporate and educational environment, the majority of respondents considers using large format writing surfaces a social activity. Especially in the corporate segment, writing and the visualization of thoughts are seen as key aspects when it comes to developing ideas and strategies together. In contrast, in the educational segment writing surfaces are mainly used by teachers as the focal point of school lessons. Additionally, also student use more and more writing surfaces in active learning activities. And not only the context of usage – educational or corporate – shows impact on the considered role of writing surfaces, but also the specific field and purpose of application. Especially for classical and thus analogue writing surfaces end users verbalize a very clear and differentiated view on the purpose of

various kinds of surfaces: whiteboards are often used for the visualization of dynamic information, e.g. the display of evolving processes or for the development of ideas in an early stage. Flipcharts are mostly applied to

present static information, such as an agenda, summarizing bullet points or prepared sheets with drawings and further explanations to support training sessions.



**2** Following the results of the empirical study, whiteboards do especially a good job in supporting creative processes. For this purpose, analogue surfaces are preferred by both, corporate and educational end users, as the writing and drawing process stimulates peoples' creativity. In the corporate environment, analogue writing

surfaces are frequently used for brainstorm sessions, problem analyses and mind mapping, but also for visualizing and monitoring of project planning. In the



educational segment, analogue writing surfaces are applied for further deepening of the teaching material and thus being considered a perfect tool for responding on students' questions and remarks in a creative and direct way. Due to its ease of use, a whiteboard can easily be utilised when a lesson requires some kind of improvisation. One interviewee stated that: "By writing you give a 'live' presentation which is in some cases even stronger than a PowerPoint or other digital presentation."

**3** Nowadays, the importance of Agile working methods is steadily increasing and with this development an increase in visualization itself is expected. In both countries, Germany and the Netherlands, Agile methods are considered to gain more importance over the next years, especially in the corporate segment. A key aspect of Agile is visualization and therefore a consequence is the intense use of visual communication products, such as a variety of pens, magnetic symbols, (self-adhesive) notes and large writing surfaces. "The acceptance of Agile working methods leads to more demand for (large) writing walls", says one interviewee. His colleague also adds that in order to enhance that in order to enhance plausibility/credibility "the course of a project has to be visualized with

**4** writing surfaces, notes and sticky symbols." In the educational environment, Agile working appears in the form of active learning methods, where, just as seen with Agile working in the corporate segment, there is an increased need for visualization / visual communication products. In general these methods require a lot of team work and cooperative learning practices. In this respect the visualization of working processes plays an important role. In the Netherlands, Agile working methods, as for example the Scrum method, are now applied as teaching methods, too. This development is not yet seen in the German market, yet considering the role of the Dutch market a frontrunner regarding Visual Communication and collaboration on a European scope, this trend can be expected to be seen in other European markets in the short- to midterm. Hence products like (Scrum) posters and notes, formally only known in a corporate context, are used to visualize and monitor the project planning process and learning journey in the educational segment.

**3** Agile working methods lead to more visualisation



**4** New (active) learning methods lead to more visualisation



# ESSENTIAL RESULTS

## 2. Size and design matter!

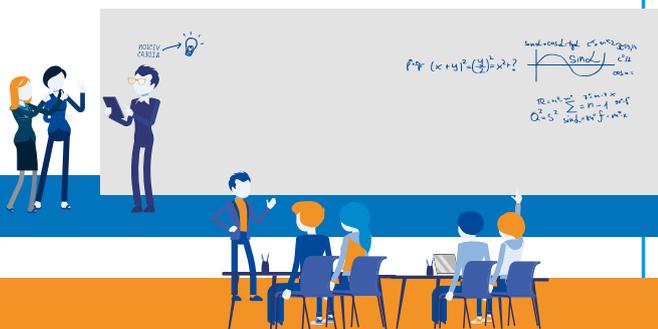
The width of the surface is more important than its height

**1** In both the corporate and educational segment, end users prefer large writing surfaces. “The bigger, the better” is the mutually expressed claim. Yet, size needs to be seen in a differentiated way. An interesting finding from the Legamaster study is, that the width of the writing surface is considered more important than the height. End users wish for no limitation and interruptions whilst writing, so they can keep writing by moving in front of the writing surface – e.g. by creating an entirely writable wall.

Corporate end users and teachers like to have an overview over the whole process of idea development over time and in retrospective: notes and drawings have to remain visible on the board, showing the whole process of what has been discussed and developed during a meeting or lesson.



**1** The bigger, the better



**2** End users prefer a whiteboard without print



**2** In addition to a preference for wide surfaces, users also prefer empty or blank surfaces without pre-prints, especially when it comes to creative processes. For planning-activities, pre-printed surfaces are common and also seen as beneficial in the corporate segment. For the educational segment, a grid structure is considered useful, for example to provide extra support during mathematic or physics lessons.

**3** Especially corporate end users appreciate a nice design. It is seen as being of high importance, although functionality is and remains key feature regarding the purchase decision. Generally, there is a strong wish for presentation products that fit in the design of the office building. Optics of furniture and equipment are more and more considered to have an impact on peoples' work and performance. Yet, even in times of fancy and colorful offices, plain and timeless designs are considered a standard feature for writing surfaces.

**4** Apart from the esthetic aspect of writing surfaces, mobility and multifunctionality are appreciated, especially when it comes to group work – in this setting it is essential to create space and change perspective easily. E.g. a multifunctional writing /dividing wall is treasured to create additional writing spaces as well as individual work spaces.

**3** Corporate end users appreciate design



**4** Mobility & multifunctionality is appreciated in the corporate environment



# ESSENTIAL RESULTS

## 3. Analogue writing surfaces are used at a high intensity

Analogue writing surfaces experience a renaissance



showing presentations, digital teaching material or playing interactive games. Due to the increasing availability of digital teaching material, digital presentation products are considered indispensable. However, in both segments numerous features of interactive products are not used at all. As stated before, interactive surfaces are mostly used for presenting and not that often for writing, saving or sharing of information. An important reason for the oftentimes limited use of interactive writing

**1** The interviewees in the corporate segment who actually have experience with interactive surfaces state, that they use digital surfaces mainly for presentations.

surfaces is located by interviewees in a lack of proper product training. As a result, many end users do not feel comfortable and save with the usage of an interactive solutions and hence do not exploit their full potential.

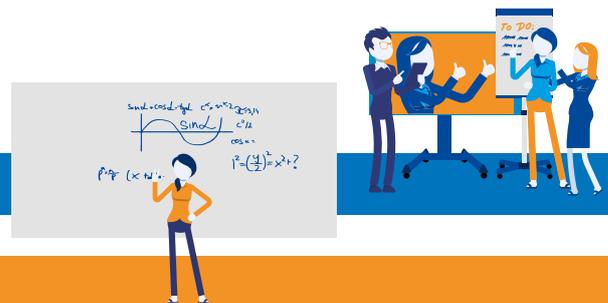
In the educational segment all end users interviewed during the study have experiences with interactive surfaces. Interactive solutions are mostly used for

**2** Despite the ubiquitous megatrend of digitalization, analogue writing surfaces are still very actively used. For (especially hand)

**1** Limited use made of the numerous features of an interactive display



**2** Despite the process of digitalisation, analogue writing surfaces are still actively used

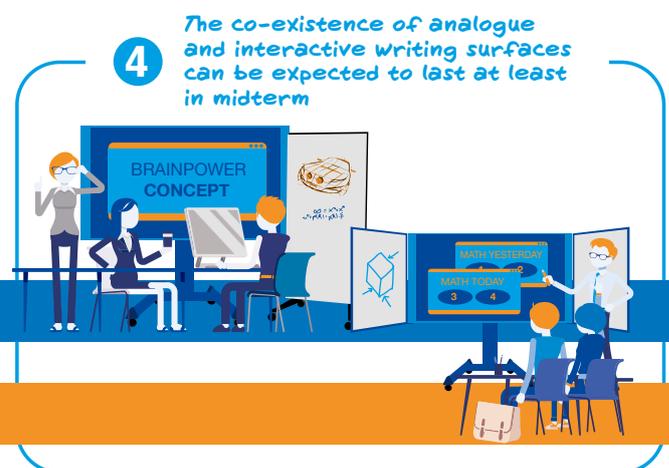


writing activities end users of both segments even explicitly prefer an analogue writing surface. Analogue surfaces are considered more “authentic and flexible”, creating more “proximity” in a group situation. In the corporate segment analogue surfaces are actively used for example for collaboration, brainstorming sessions and idea creation. In the educational segment analogue surfaces are applied when responding on feedback from the class, as analogue products are easy accessible and hence quickly to use. Next to this, analogue surfaces are preferred in brainstorm sessions and other project-based educational activities.

**3** Yet, due to the increasing availability of technical teaching material, digital presentation products are considered necessary in classrooms. However, according to all interviewees asked, writing surfaces will still remain essential in the future classroom. End users of the corporate and educational sections share the same claim: “Writing is here to stay!” An interesting new trend towards drawing and writing is seen by corporate interviewees, referring to a new way of presenting. By drawing the message using analogue means instead of showing a digital presentation has become a major

trend and is leading to a renaissance of analogue writing surfaces and accessories, especially driven within the demographic group of millennials.

**4** Therefore, the co-existence of analogue and interactive writing surfaces can be expected to last - at least in the midterm. Analogue and digital presentation products can be considered complementary, but playing different roles. While digital writing surfaces are mainly used for presenting, analogue writing surfaces are preferred for actual writing and drawing activities. The study also shows that future offices will involve the presence of more writing surfaces: large and small, analogue and digital. Future classrooms will remain equipped with both analogue writing products and digital presentation solutions. Both analogue and digital presentation products will remain essential in a more collaborative and flexible future office- and classroom design.



# CONCLUSION

Even though digitalization is considered to repress analogue writing surfaces, this hypothesis is not supported by the empirical study conducted. Digital solutions and interactive screens gain importance, of course, but analogue writing solutions will remain an essential tool due to their special role. Whilst working on boards doing brainstorming or applying other Agile working methods, people interact with each other – in this sense they socialize with the help of writing surfaces. Moreover creativity can be stimulated by working with the help of an analogue writing surface instead of using purely digital products. This counts for both segments, the educational field as well as for the corporate sector. Presenting a topic live by giving attendees the possibility to follow the process and see the result written down adds a new impetus to work. Moreover, modern working methods like Agile are expected to gain even more importance in Germany and the Netherlands over the years to come, requesting specific surfaces to visualize thinking processes and their outcomes. All end users wish to follow the whole

**“Analogue and digital writing can and will coexist.”**

procedure or idea development on big surfaces and thus choose width over height regarding board sizes. Grid structures are only of limited interest: In the educational segments these structures are considered useful, but surfaces without prints are preferred by the majority of interviewees. Combined with a timeless design surfaces find highest appreciation. Nevertheless, functionality will always be the key feature in both markets investigated. Another important issue, especially for the educational segment is mobility: perspectives can be changed easily and the workspace can be individualized and hence optimized. In contrast to the numerous application possibilities for analogue surfaces, digital surfaces are often only used for presentations due to a lack of proper product training and missing ease of use. Considering all these facts, the present study shows that analogue and interactive writing surfaces can and will coexist at least in midterm, fulfilling different purposes from a user’s perspective, and hence only together provide a holistic solution for Visual Communication applications.